

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of tournament gaming, comprising:  
providing a plurality of gaming devices configured for a maximum rate of play responsive to player input and an automated minimum rate of play of at least one game of chance to be played in a tournament;  
initiating the tournament; and  
playing the at least one game of chance a plurality of times during the tournament on at least one gaming device of the plurality of gaming devices at a rate no less than the automated minimum rate of play.
2. The method of claim 1, further comprising activating the automated minimum rate of play on the at least one gaming device of the plurality when a player does not initiate play of the at least one game of chance within a predetermined interval of time after the at least one gaming device is initialized for play thereof.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein the activating the automated minimum rate of play comprises initiating a game of the at least one game of chance in each instance in which the player does not initiate play of the at least one game of chance within the predetermined interval of time.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the automated minimum rate of play comprises a percentage of a standard rate of play of the at least one game of chance in at least one tournament.
5. The method of claim 4, further comprising sampling rates of play of the at least one game on at least some of the plurality of gaming devices played responsive to player initiation in a tournament and deriving the standard rate of tournament play from the sampling.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the sampling is conducted by a computer networked to the plurality of gaming devices.
7. The method of claim 4, wherein the percentage of the standard rate of tournament play is preset in memory associated with a microprocessor of the at least one gaming device.
8. The method of claim 1, further comprising displaying to a player of at least some of the gaming devices at least one of the player's average rate of play, relative rate of play as compared with other competing players in the tournament , and relative ranking in rate of play as compared with other competing players in the tournament.
9. The method of claim 1, further comprising qualifying for play in the tournament by tendering a wager to initiate a primary game of chance and playing the initiated game of chance at least one time to at least one selected game outcome.
10. The method of claim 9, further comprising converting at least some of the plurality of gaming machines between play of a primary game of chance in a first mode and play of the at least one game of chance in a second, tournament mode.
11. The method of claim 1, wherein said playing the at least one game of chance comprises playing the at least one game of chance at a rate at least that of the automated minimum rate of play and interrupting the automated minimum rate of play of at least one gaming device of the plurality in favor of at least one period of wherein the rate of play is responsive to player initiation.
12. The method of claim 11, wherein said interrupting the automated minimum rate of play comprises randomly discontinuing the automated minimum rate of play in favor of periods of player-initiated play.

13. The method of claim 11, wherein said interrupting the automated minimum rate of play comprises interrupting the automated minimum rate of play in favor of periods of player-initiated play occurring at defined intervals.
14. The method of claim 13, further comprising displaying to a tournament player the time left between the defined intervals of player-initiated play.
15. The method of claim 11, wherein at least some of the periods of player-initiated play are relatively shorter than periods of automated play.
16. A method of tournament gaming, comprising:  
providing a plurality of gaming devices adapted for tournament play, the plurality of gaming devices configured to automatically initiate a game of chance during tournament play upon expiration of a predetermined time interval after completion of a prior play of the game of chance;  
initiating a tournament on at least one of the plurality of gaming devices;  
playing the least one game of chance a plurality of times on  
the at least one gaming device and providing the predetermined time interval for a player to initiate each play of the game of chance; and  
automatically initiating the game of chance if the player fails to initiate play of the game of chance prior to the expiration of the predetermined time interval.
17. The method of claim 16, wherein the predetermined time interval is related to a time interval for player-responsive game initiation.
18. The method of claim 17, further comprising sampling rates of play of at least some gaming devices of the plurality of gaming devices played during the tournament and deriving the time interval associated responsive to player initiation of the game from the sampling.

19. The method of claim 17, wherein the sampling is conducted by a computer networked to the plurality of gaming devices.
20. The method of claim 17, wherein the predetermined time interval is preset in memory associated with a microprocessor of the at least one gaming device.
21. The method of claim 17, wherein the predetermined time interval is calculated to provide a minimum rate of play ranging from about 70 percent to about 95 percent of the rate of play of the game responsive to player initiation.
22. The method of claim 16, further comprising displaying on the at least one gaming device at least one of the player's average rate of play, relative rate of play as compared with other competing players in the tournament, or relative ranking in rate of play as compared with other competing players in the tournament.
23. The method of claim 16, further comprising qualifying for play of the game of chance in a tournament by tendering a wager to initiate a primary game of chance and playing the initiated primary game of chance at least one time to at least one selected game outcome.
24. The method of claim 23, further comprising converting at least some of the plurality of gaming devices between play of a primary game of chance in a first mode and play of the game of chance in a second, tournament mode.
25. The method of claim 16, further comprising configuring the plurality of gaming devices as slot machines.

26. A method of lessening the variance between numbers of games played during fixed periods of tournament gaming, comprising:
- providing a plurality of gaming devices adapted for tournament play, the plurality of gaming devices configured to automatically initiate a play of a game of chance during tournament play upon the expiration of a predetermined time interval without interaction from a player;
- initiating tournament play of the game of chance a plurality of times by players on the plurality of gaming devices for a period of time;
- permitting the players to initiate play of each tournament game of the at least one tournament game of chance on the plurality of gaming devices prior to the expiration of the predetermined time interval; and
- automatically initiating play of the game on any gaming device of the plurality of gaming devices in which a player thereof does not initiate play of the game prior to the expiration of the predetermined time interval.
27. The method of claim 26, wherein said automatically initiating play of a tournament game comprises establishing a predetermined minimum rate of play on the plurality of gaming devices.
28. The method of claim 27, wherein the predetermined minimum rate of play comprises a percentage of a standard rate of tournament play.
29. The method of claim 28, further comprising sampling the rate of play of at least some of the plurality of gaming devices and deriving the standard rate of tournament play from the sampling.
30. The method of claim 29, wherein the sampling is conducted by a computer networked to the plurality of gaming devices.

31. The method of claim 28, wherein the percentage of the standard rate of tournament play is preset in memory associated with a microprocessor of each of the gaming devices.
32. The method of claim 28, wherein the predetermined minimum rate of play ranges from about 70 percent to about 95 percent of the rate of the standard rate of play.
33. The method of claim 26, further comprising configuring the plurality of gaming devices as a plurality of slot machines.
34. A method of tournament gaming, comprising:  
providing a plurality of gaming devices adapted for tournament play and  
configured to play at least one game of chance at variable rates of play;  
initiating a tournament game of chance on at least one gaming device of the  
plurality of gaming devices; and  
playing the tournament game of chance at a first permitted rate of play and changing the rate of  
play to a second permitted rate of play in response to at least one selected game outcome  
of the at least one game of chance.
35. The method of claim 34, wherein the second permitted rate of play reverts to the first  
permitted rate of play in response to occurrence of at least one other selected game  
outcome.
36. The method of claim 35, wherein the second permitted rate of play is relatively faster  
than the first permitted rate of play.
37. The method of claim 35, wherein the second permitted rate of play is relatively slower  
than the first permitted rate of play.

38. The method of claim 34, wherein the second permitted rate of play reverts to the first permitted rate of play in response to the expiration of a predetermined interval of time.
39. A gaming machine configured for tournament gaming, comprising a gaming device configured to permit a player to initiate play of a tournament game of chance within a predetermined time interval, the gaming device further configured to automatically initiate play of the tournament game of chance upon the expiration of the predetermined time interval without input from the player.
40. The gaming device of claim 39, wherein the gaming device is normally configured in a first mode for play of a primary game of chance and selectively configurable to a second mode for play of the tournament game of chance by a player qualified for tournament play responsive to at least one selected outcome of at least one play of the primary game.
41. The gaming device of claim 39, wherein the predetermined time interval without interaction from the tournament player correlates with a minimum rate at which the gaming device permits play of the tournament game of chance.
42. The gaming device of claim 41, wherein the minimum rate at which the gaming device permits play of the tournament game of chance is derived from a percentage of a standard rate of tournament play.
43. A gaming machine configured for tournament gaming, comprising a gaming device configured to permit a tournament player to play at least one tournament game of chance at a first permitted rate of play during a tournament, and configured to change the first permitted rate of play to a second permitted rate of play in response to at least one selected game outcome occurring during the tournament duration.

44. The gaming machine of claim 43, wherein the second permitted rate of play reverts to the first permitted rate of play in response to at least one other selected game outcome occurring during the tournament duration.
45. The method of claim 44, wherein the second permitted rate of play is relatively faster than the first permitted rate of play.
46. The method of claim 44, wherein the second permitted rate of play is relatively slower than the first permitted rate of play.
47. The method of claim 43, wherein the second permitted rate of play reverts to the first permitted rate of play in response to the expiration of a predetermined interval of time.

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